

that is what we owe the founders of Israel, to finish Ben-Gurion's dream.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Menachem Magidor, president, and Menahem Ben-Sasson, rector, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Rev. James M. Dunn, execu-

tive director, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; Sulayman S. Nyang, president, Interfaith Conference of Washington, DC; Ismar Schorsch, chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary; actors Richard Dreyfuss and Linda Lavin; Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Eliahu Ben-Elissar and his wife, Nitza; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Abba Eban, former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations.

Remarks on Receiving the Surgeon General's Report on Tobacco Use Among Minority Groups *April 27, 1998*

Thank you very much, Dr. Satcher, for the exceptional report. I thank all those who worked on it. Mr. Vice President, Secretary Shalala, thank you for your long and constant fidelity to this cause. Thank you, Senator Frist, for being here, for demonstrating that it is a medical, not a political issue, and an American, not a partisan issue. You gave us a "two-fer" today, and we thank you for that. You were great. [Applause] Thank you.

I also thank Senator Hatch and Senator Chafee for being here, all the Members of the House of Representatives. I thank the leaders of the Native American tribes who are here. I especially thank the attorneys general who are here. They had a lot to do with beginning this long struggle to free our children from tobacco, and they deserve a lot of the credit for the efforts that are now going on. And I'd like to thank the young people who are standing behind me and those whom they represent, all across America, in the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Youth. They represent the future we are trying to preserve.

This report gives us fresh evidence that those of us in this society who are adults, and especially those of us who are parents, are not doing our jobs very well. Any of us who have ever been parents know that our most profound and instinctive urge is to protect our children from danger so that they can grow up healthy, safe, and secure.

Just today I was talking, before I came in here, with a Member of the House who was at our previous event, and he was talking about a young staff member of his who was dealing

with a serious health problem. And he choked up; he couldn't even finish the conversation. And he's a good person with a good heart, but that reflects the natural human response we have to protect our own children and all those who are of the younger generation from whatever dangers we can, in the hope that they will have the opportunity to live full, good lives.

Well, we've done a good job over the years of strapping our kids into seatbelts in cars, in safety seats. We do a pretty good job of bundling up children against the winter cold; not many of them die of pneumonia anymore. We make sure that they get to school safely each day. But we haven't done what we should in wrapping the protective arm of parents and other adults in our society as a whole around them when it comes to resisting advertising, peer pressure, or whatever other forces get young people into smoking, even though it's illegal to sell cigarettes to children in every State in the United States.

We know that today about a third of our children are smoking. The report issued by Dr. Satcher shows that more and more are becoming hooked on cigarettes. Smoking rates are up among teens of all backgrounds, but now we see especially among Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and especially and most dramatically among African-Americans, where the rates used to be dramatically lower than the average.

These are children just starting out in life; they've got enough challenges as it is. We ought to do more to clear the way, to assure them the best possible chance at the future of their

dreams. Instead, they are still becoming the targets of highly sophisticated marketing campaigns. They are the “replacement smokers” of the advertisers’ strategy. But they are our children, and we can’t replace them.

The call to action should be getting louder. Congress has a very important opportunity to build on the work done by the attorneys general, the representatives of individuals who have been harmed in smoking, and others—the work of the FDA—to pass a comprehensive, bipartisan tobacco bill that will cut teen smoking by raising the price of cigarettes, putting into place tough restrictions on advertising and access, imposing strong penalties on those who continue to sell cigarettes to children, ensuring the FDA has the authority it needs to regulate tobacco products, protecting farmers and farming communities, and yes, doing what Dr. Satcher says we still need to do, continuing to invest more in research to find out the answers that we don’t have yet in this regard.

A bill sponsored by Senator McCain and voted out of the committee with all but one vote—a unanimous vote save one—is a good step in that direction, because it explicitly changes the rules of the game to make it much harder for the tobacco industry to profit at the expense of our children’s health.

I want to say a special word of thanks, too, to Senator Frist, because he’s worked so hard to make sure that the bill provides the FDA with the authority it needs to continue to cover tobacco products.

Now, folks, the Surgeon General has just issued his first report. It’s a fine report. It’s a compelling report. It is obviously compelling to the leaders of the groups from whom these children come, because they have come here. We know what the danger is. We know what the remedy is. They’re just kids; we’re the grown-ups. Now, if we know what the danger

is and we know what the remedy is, are we going to do what it takes to save their lives and their health and their future, or not? It is as simple as that. This is not rocket science.

I have been profoundly moved by the extent to which this really has become an issue about health, not politics, an issue about our children, not partisan differences. Every step along the way we have been able to reach across party lines; we’ve been able to put aside rhetoric; we’ve been able to try to look to the health issue of our children.

Now, I know there are some complexities surrounding this issue. There are complexities: How much money should be raised? How should it be spent? How should we assure the continuing jurisdiction of the FDA? Exactly what are the nature of the advertising restrictions? There are complicated questions. But my experience now, after many, many years in public life, is that all the complicated questions get much simpler if you focus on the big issue.

The big issue is that the children behind us deserve to have a future, and we know that unless we do something to stop them from being treated as replacement smokers, their future will be restricted. That is the big issue. We know what the problem is; we know what to do about it. I suggest that these children—you look at them, look at all those they represent, look at those who don’t yet have the good sense to put their tee shirts on and join their crusades—and it becomes pretty clear that we need to take this very first report by our latest distinguished Surgeon General and do the right thing with the report and for our children.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. The report was entitled “Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups.”